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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000748

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/20/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [KIRF](#) [ER](#)
SUBJECT: IMPRISONED CHRISTIAN DIES IN DETENTION

Classified By: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Following up on reports from various human rights websites, post has confirmed the death of Nigisti Haile at the Wi'a Military Training Center, located south of the city of Massawa. Emboff spoke with a family member on September ¶18. Her family member confirmed that an official from the Southern Red Sea Zoba (region), in which the Wi'a facility is located, contacted the family to inform them that Nigisti had died from heat stroke. Ms. Haile, an Eritrean citizen reportedly in her early 30s, was arrested over a year ago during a church meeting in Keren. A member of the unregistered Rema Protestant Church, Haile was held in Wi'a and reportedly tortured for refusing to recant her faith. Another friend of the family, who is also imprisoned at Wi'a managed to get a message to Ms. Haile's family confirming that her death resulting from injuries sustained during torture.

2.(C) In another case of imprisonment, one of the Embassy's locally employed staff members was arrested on July 28 because of his membership in the unregistered Full Gospel Pentecostal Church. He was imprisoned for a month. In a debriefing with post's Management Officer following his release, the employee reported that he was arrested while participating in a small prayer session in a friend's home. He refused to provide any details of his detention. What makes his arrest unique is that the Government of the State of Eritrea (GSE) provided him with a copy of a letter, addressed to the district administrator of the area of Asmara in which the employee lives, explaining that he was arrested because of his religious affiliation. The letter explained that his release was conditional upon his signing a statement agreeing to recant his faith and to choose a "customary" Eritrean religious faith. (Note: One presumes the letter refers to one of the four official religions of Eritrea: Islam, Eritrean Orthodox Christian Church, Catholic Church or the Evangelical Lutheran Church. End Note.) The letter also requested that the district officials observe him indefinitely and ensure he complies with the agreement he signed. Since his return home, the employee reports that he is routinely followed and harassed and his home has been searched. Feeling unsafe and fearing arrest, he is exploring opportunities to depart Eritrea.

¶3. (U) Amidst the reports of on-going GSE-directed religious persecution) and the day after the release of the International Religious Freedom Report - the GSE published

September 15 on its official webpage (www.shabait.com) a three paragraph editorial about religious harmony in Eritrea.

In this statement, the GSE claims that the Eritrean people understand that the "basic philosophy behind all religions is to create social harmony." As such, the editorial claims (falsely), that "religious holidays are celebrated not only by the followers of that faith but are rather celebrated by everyone in the country, regardless of religious affiliation" and that Eritrean society lives "in (sic) a higher plane of spiritual understanding." The editorial continues, "...Eritrean religious understanding is several steps ahead of those who seek to manipulate religion for political ends and then try to cover up their intentions by engaging in childish analyses."

14. (C) Comment: These reports, sadly, are yet further examples of the continuing persecution of Eritrean citizens who wish to practice different religions, and a classic illustration of the government media trying to refute GSE actions in spite of clear evidence to the contrary. All attempts to date to engage the GSE on addressing violations of religious freedom have failed, with the GSE presenting the same "religious harmony" rejoinder. At this point in time post sees no change in the GSE's policy toward the "unofficial" religions and we anticipate that our annual demarche to the MFA on Eritrea's status as a "Country of Particular Concern" will be met with indifference. End Comment.
MCINTYRE